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ABSTRACT

The ethics and conduct of social studies teachers are discussed and the values that should guide their classroom behavior are articulated. Two sources of values are integrated to derive the value base for ethical conduct. The first source utilizes the three criteria for education presented by the educational philosopher, R. S. Peters--character and intellectual development, conceptual development, and learner consciousness. The second draws on the democratic ethic and gives paramount emphasis to human dignity and rational processes. Guided by these values, the purpose of schooling for the social studies teacher is to develop educated and ethical citizens who possess the knowledge, values, and skills to be effective participants in a democratic society. A portion of the paper is devoted to the dilemmas that arise among parents, teachers, and students regarding the purpose of schooling. The role that teachers play in preserving the equilibrium of power between parents, teachers, and students is delineated. Case studies of tense situations are presented, and there are suggestions on actions social studies teachers might take in each situation. A section on knowledge and methods of study emphasizes that teachers have a responsibility to act when values inherent in democratic education are challenged. Teachers need to foster educated and ethical decision-making action while protecting student rights to learn and to privacy. (Author/DB)

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The Social Studies Teacher:

An Exploration of Ethical Behavior

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This paper is concerned with the ethical behavior of teachers. It is predicated on the parity principle which seeks an equilibrium of freedom and power between society, teachers and students. Before it is possible to delineate the specific nature of the ethical conduct of a profession it is essential to identify the fundamental values that professional behavior must reflect. Without a set of values it is impossible to describe or discuss what is ethical.

Two sources of values are integrated to derive the value base for ethical conduct. The first source utilizes the three criteria for education presented by the educational philosopher, R. S. Peters in his book Ethics and Education. The second draws on the democratic ethic and gives paramount emphasis to human dignity and rational processes.

For analytic purposes, I would first like to examine the set of values that should guide the conduct of all persons who teach--that is the values that should be held by all teachers regardless of ther content-fields. Secondly, I would like to examine the values that should guide the conduct of teachers of the social studies in particular. Implicitly, I am stating that the specific nature of ethical conduct for social studies teachers will

be derived from their responsibilities as teachers, in the general sense, as well as their specific responsibilities that stem from their role in social studies education.

The criteria for educational processes posited by Peters entail values that implicitly guide the behavior of teachers. They are presented here as a useful point of departure. They may or may not represent sufficient criteria. My analysis of them, however, has led me to conclude that they are a useful starting point for judging the decisions and actions of teachers.

The first criterion states that education must entail the transmission of what is worthwhile. In the context of education, what is worthwhile is that which develops the character and intellect of the individual. Further, that which is educationally worthwhile expands the individual's opportunities to know and seek the truth. A second criterion deals with what Peters calls the cognitive aspects of education. Here, Peters argues that it is not sufficient for education to enhance the development of skills or the acquisition of knowledge as a collection of disjointed facts. Rather, educational processes must provide the learner with a conceptual framework for looking at the world. The learner should acquire a set of explanations about the world and not be limited to descriptive facts alone. Further, the

learner should understand the nature of a particular field of study and develop a commitment to its standards. In other words, the learner should have a grasp of the internal aspects of a body of thought and not be limited to knowing only the findings or external nature of any field of study. In addition the learner should develop an understanding of the relationship between a given body of knowledge and life. He or she should be able to place the understandings gained in the context of the total human experience. In other words, it is not sufficient to train someone to be a specialist--no matter how sophisticated that specialization might be. Rather, to qualify as sound education, learning must not be limited to specialized skills but should attend to expanding the individual's vision of life.

In his third criterion, Peters turns to the manner (or methods) of education and argues that educational processes must involve a dimension of consciousness on the learner's part. In effect, learners must be aware and must understand what it is they are learning about if intellect and character are to be developed. Teaching requires that reasons be revealed to the learner. Learners must not be treated as mindless robots or a bundles of stimulus--response connections. This criterion rules out the use of expository techniques as long as the learner is given reasons for what is going on and for

what is being learned. Conditioning and brainwashing are ruled out because they are processes that do not reveal reasons to the learner.

To the extent that teachers implement the educational process, these three criteria (or educational values) must guide their decisions and actions.

1. They must transmit that which develops the intellect and character of the learner and that which helps the learner know the truth.
2. They must provide students with a conceptual grasp of an area of thought or field of study. They must introduce learners to the standards of a field and cultivate respect for those standards. Finally they must facilitate the development of a broadening of the learner's intellectual perspective so that the understanding of a given field of study is integrated into a coherent pattern of life.
3. Learners must be mindful of the teacher's methods.

At this point, I would like to address the values that explicitly impinge on the teacher of social studies. Social Studies educators seek to develop educated citizens who can and will behave ethically in the context of a democratic society. The social studies teacher in a public school setting acts as an agent of a democratic society. (For a fuller discussion

of this point see: James P. Shaver and William Strong. Facing Value Decisions: Rationale-Building for Teachers. Belmont, California, Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1976.) Thus, the conduct of the social studies teacher must also be guided by those values that are central to the democratic ethic. In a democracy, the central value is human dignity. The premise that every individual has worth and is deserving of respect is the sine qua non of a democratic society. This value entails both equal treatment under law as well as equality of opportunity. It also entails freedom of choice, the freedom to live life as one chooses as well as the freedoms articulated in the Bill of Rights. Democracy is also based on rationality--the principle that decisions will be made in a reason-giving way and one that honors the use of evidence and the free exchange of ideas. One could elaborate at length on the meaning of human dignity and rationality and their derivative values. However, for the purpose of this paper it is sufficient to state that these values are especially salient for guiding the behavior of social studies teachers in a democratic society.

How do these values relate to the three criteria for education posited by Peters? First, they provide additional substance to the criterion that education must transmit that which is worthwhile. In addition to the idea

that education should develop the intellect and character of the individual, adherence to democratic values suggests that what is worthwhile must lead the learner to understand and appreciate basic democratic values. In effect, educational processes should equip citizens with the knowledge, values and participation skills that enhance the individual's potential to think and act as an effective citizen in a democratic society. In this way, the rights of the teacher are limited by the right of a democratic society to socialize the young in ways that are consistent with its values and to transmit knowledge and skills which inform the intellect and character of the learner.

Peters' second criterion deals with the cognitive aspects of education. Specifically, it calls attention to the learner's meaningful understanding of what is transmitted as distinct from acquiring only descriptive knowledge. In addition, this criterion focuses on understanding of the standards of a body of thought. Finally it emphasizes cognitive perspective--the intellectual capacity to integrate a body of thought into a wholistic and coherent pattern of life. When meshed with the values of a democratic society, the standard for teacher conduct that emerges is one that states that social studies teachers have a responsibility to transmit a meaningful understanding of the values of a democratic society, to transmit an under-

standing of the standards by which actions are judged in a democratic system and to lead the learner to see democratic values as but one set of values that can guide a political system. Here, the rights of the teacher are limited by the rights of students to develop meaningful understanding of democracy and gain perspective of how that body of knowledge or thought fits into a coherent pattern of life. In short, the rights of the teacher are limited by the rights of students to know the truth and the rights of the society to socialize its young.

The third criterion stresses that the methods (and techniques) used by the teacher should engage the learner in a thoughtful, not mindless manner. Peters' stresses the responsibility to give reasons for what is taught and how it is taught. It seems to me that the overarching value of human dignity only strengthens this criterion. Respect for the individual further requires that the learner not be manipulated in ways of which he/she is not conscious. In addition, it expands Peters' concept of consciousness on the part of the learner. It requires that the teacher relate what is taught to the concerns of the learner. Further the value of freedom suggests that while the learner has the right to share ideas, opinions and feelings there can be no requirement to coerce the learner to do so.

In effect, freedom of speech also means the freedom not to speak. Freedom of beliefs means the freedom not to believe--even if the set of beliefs that are rejected are democratic ones. Therefore, while the teacher has a responsibility to support and strengthen democratic values, such values cannot be mandated. Such compulsory practices would misrepresent democratic values and would, at best, only beget token compliance rather than willing commitment. Regarding the method of education, the teacher is limited by the rights of students to learn in conscious ways that do not violate respect for the individual. This includes the rights of students to know the reasons behind what they are being taught as well as the reasons behind why they are being taught in a particular way. Respect for the individual's freedom also entails the responsibility to relate what is learned to the concerns of the student and to respect the student's right to privacy.

Having discussed the value base that should guide the ethical conduct of social studies teachers, I would like to turn to dilemmas that arise between parents, teachers and students regarding the purposes of schooling and the knowledge and methods of study that are utilized.

Purposes of Schooling

What then is the ethical stance that social studies teachers should take regarding the purpose of schooling? Guided by the values previously stated, the purpose of schooling for the social studies teacher is to develop educated and ethical citizens who possess the knowledge, values and skills to be effective participants in a democratic society.

Two illustrative cases will be used to delineate the tensions between parents, teachers and students. From these cases, some implications for the ethical conduct of social studies teachers will be derived.

Case #1 Teacher v. Parent

One current concern of many parents is cast in the form of a call for "the basics". Let us suppose that a group of such parents has confronted a school's administration demanding that the curriculum of the school focus dominantly on the development of reading, writing and computational skills and that attention to such "frills" as social studies be minimized if not eliminated. These parents have, in effect, challenged the purpose of schooling as held by teachers of social studies. Necessarily, the teacher of social studies, sees this effort by parents as one that suggests a narrow focus on skill development and thwarts the opportunity to develop educated

and ethical citizens. As such it is not consistent with the criteria for education in a democratic society. If implemented the purpose of developing educated and ethical citizens will be aborted or severely limited.

How should social studies teachers respond to this challenge? First of all, it seems clear that social studies teachers have a responsibility to act. The purpose of education in a democratic society is being subverted. As agents of such a society they must act to preserve that purpose. To assume a passive posture would allow any group of parents or citizens to violate the ethical criteria for education in a democratic society. Secondly, the social studies teacher must be willing to engage in a rational dialogue with parents about the purposes of schooling. They must actualize the value of rational discourse and marshal their arguments and attempt to enlighten and broaden the view of parents regarding the purposes of schooling. They need to make the point that no group of citizens has the right to divert the purpose of schooling in a way that prevents or inhibits the socialization of the young to democratic values. In sum, teachers are ethically compelled to act in such cases and act in reason-giving ways. Finally, it should be noted that inaction on the part of teachers would disturb the equilibrium of freedom and power between the three principal groups concerned with education.

Case #2 Teacher v. Student

Let us suppose that a small group of students object to the school's requirement that they must select one of several social studies electives in their senior year. They claim that the social studies class has no practical value. It will not help them to get a better job. They would rather elect an advanced course in business that would better prepare them for the world of work. The response of the social studies teacher in this case is limited by the right of the society to socialize its young to democratic values and by the teacher's role as an agent of society. The teacher must protect the purpose of schooling to develop educated and ethical citizens. Although the school may provide opportunities for students to develop career skills that is not its primary purpose. The teacher has the responsibility to give reasons for this position and to do all that is possible to relate those reasons as well as the content of the course to the concerns of students. To acquiesce to these students would both violate the values of a democratic education and would disturb the equilibrium between teachers, students and the society.

Knowledge and Methods of Study

To be ethical regarding the knowledge that is transmitted and about the methods by which it is transmitted the teacher must be able to argue that both are worthwhile in that they enhance the development of an educated and ethical citizen in a democratic society. To meet this condition the knowledge presented should represent the following criteria:

1. The knowledge should be reliable in that it can be supported logically or empirically.
2. The knowledge presented should be representative of all human diversity--cultural, racial, ethnic and economic.
3. Knowledge should be presented as tentative and subject to change.
4. The knowledge presented should illuminate a meaningful understanding of pervasive and enduring social issues.
5. The knowledge presented should include alternative values and value judgments along with their supporting rationale.

When knowledge is so characterized it can be argued that it enhances the student's opportunity to know the truth and it provides a reliable base for educated and ethical decision-making action.

The following case is presented to illustrate tension that can arise

between parents and teachers regarding knowledge.

Let us suppose that in a ninth grade civics class, the students are engaged in a consideration of welfare policy. The majority of students take a position that opposes welfare programs. To balance this view, the teacher distributes a magazine article that articulates the case in favor of certain welfare programs. The teacher tells the students that the article presents a different point of view to the one supported in class. The students are asked to identify the reasons and evidence given in the article and are subsequently involved in a class discussion about it. A few days later the teacher is confronted by an angry parent who states that the teacher has no right to influence the values of the students.

Ethical behavior on the part of the teacher would require pointing out that teachers have a responsibility to present students with alternative value judgments not in an attempt to coerce them but to enlighten their decision-making process. Emphasis needs to be placed on the point that not doing so would limit the student's opportunity to know the truth and to make informed decisions about issues. In effect, the teacher has a responsibility to act in a reason-giving way and the reasons must reflect the values that guide education in a democratic society. to give in to the

parent by agreeing not to engage in such practices again disturbs the equilibrium between parents and teachers and violates the values of a democratic education.

When making decisions about the methods of study the teacher needs to be mindful of several factors that are derived from the values that guide education in a democratic society.

1. The student has a right to learn.
2. The student has a right to be aware or conscious of the methods of study that are being used. In addition, the student has the right to know the reasons for employing a specific methods of study.
3. The student has a right to privacy.

However, the teacher has a responsibility to employ methods that will contribute to the ability of students to make educated and ethical decisions. This responsibility entails the use of methods that will permit students to apply knowledge in decision-making contexts. The following case illustrates a dilemma between teachers and students regarding the methods of study.

A teacher has engaged students in a discussion of their opinions about euthanasia. One student has remained silent. The teacher speci-

fically calls on her for an expression of opinion. The student says that she would rather not talk about it. The teacher presses her further by stating that issues must be discussed if decisions are going to be made about them. The student responds by saying she doesn't have any opinions. After class the student tells the teacher that she does not feel that she should be pressured into stating opinions.

In this case, the student has called an appropriate foul. While teachers have the right and responsibility to provide a forum for the open discussion of issues, this does not include the right to coerce students into publicly stating their views. Ethical behavior in this case would involve an apology on the part of the teacher and a commitment not to engage in such tactics in the future. The student is claiming rights that she is entitled to in the context of a democratic education. Not to agree with the student in this case would not only violate those rights but disturb the balance of power between students and teachers by providing the teacher with ungrounded authority.

In summary, this paper has attempted to articulate the values that should guide the conduct of social studies teachers. In addition to those values, it has delineated the role that teachers play in preserving the

equilibrium of power between parents, teachers and students. Finally, it has stated that when the values inherent in democratic education are challenged teachers have a responsibility to act. Their actions should take of form of marshalling arguments in defense of such values and their related behaviors and engaging other actors in the educational arena in rational discourse. In this way social studies teachers assume an active responsibility for the nature of social studies in the public educational institutions.

At best, this paper represents a preliminary exploration into the ethics and the conduct of social studies teachers. This treatment has not been exhaustive of all domains of concern nor of all contingencies that might arise. Hopefully, it represnnts a thoughtful probing into a difficult but penetrating dimension of the profession.